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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TALKS TURKEY

Tips for Preparing a Safe Thanksgiving Meal

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) wants to help all Virginians have a happy and healthy Thanksgiving by offering some easy tips on preparing the traditional Thanksgiving turkey. Safe storage and preparation of your holiday bird will help avoid food-borne illnesses such as salmonella and E. coli so you can enjoy the holiday with your family.

Before buying your turkey, make sure that there is enough room in your refrigerator to store it. After purchase, take your bird home immediately and follow these safe storage and handling tips:

- Store your turkey in a refrigerator at 40 F or below, or freeze it to zero degrees.
- Be sure the turkey is wrapped well so that juices will not leak and contaminate other foods.
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends three ways to defrost turkeys: in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave. Turkeys should never be defrosted on the counter. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for one to two days.
- Thoroughly wash hands, utensils, countertops and anything that comes in contact with raw turkey with soap and water.

Is it ready yet? The USDA recommends using a meat thermometer to determine when your turkey is done.

- A whole turkey should be cooked to 180 degrees.
- A turkey breast should register 170 degrees.
- When cooking a stuffed turkey, be sure the center temperature reaches 165 degrees.

Before you take your after-meal nap, don't forget to put your leftovers in the refrigerator. Any turkey, gravy or stuffing that is left out at room temperature for longer than two hours should be thrown away. Leftovers should be eaten within three to four days—plenty of time to enjoy those turkey sandwiches and extra stuffing.

With the ongoing news coverage of avian influenza, VDH wants to remind you that your Thanksgiving turkey poses an extremely low risk of carrying any form of avian flu. Avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu, is an infection caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally in birds. At this time, there have been no reported cases of avian influenza in either poultry or people in the United States, including the H5N1 strain that has been in the news in Europe and Asia. Eating properly cooked poultry should prevent infection from diseases and viruses such as avian influenza.

To learn more about safe poultry handling and preparation, call the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) 674-6854 or visit www.fsis.usda.gov. For more information on avian influenza, visit VDH's Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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